

Institutional genres

Scholarly vs. Popularized Buscom Writings: two sides of the same elephant?

Glen Michael Alessi

Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia

The widespread popularity of 'problem-solving' pop-management literature, in the form of self-help books and 'how-to' manuals, has promoted an authorial voice, or, a default 'go-to' or primary information source for managers and business communications practitioners who seek to improve or their professional know-how and performance (Frenkel 2005: 138).

Their advocates (including authors and publishers) argue that such readings, by drawing upon scholarly writings and evidence-based practices in organizational settings, result in creatively reinterpreted, credible and inspiring experienced-based narratives that abridge the normal requirement for scholarship based on evidence and causality.

Their critics, on the other hand, argue that these mediated forms of expertise are shallow summaries in the form of check-lists, suggesting simplistic remedies to managerial, organizational and personal work-related challenges, and are accused of “ ..fostering a world of make-believe characterized by reductionism and the tendency to reduce the complex to the simple” (Wood/ de Paula 2008:197).

From yet another perspective: might researchers and pop-management authors be looking at the flip-side of the same coin, or, like the blind men and the elephant, defining and describing comparable situations in different terms and from different perspectives while coming to conclusions which are not, at first glance, recognizable as mutually compatible?

This study consists of a critical exploration of the generic conventions and examines evaluative lexicogrammatical features employed (Hunston/Thompson 2010), such as importance markers, overlexicalisations or forced primings to see language choices made in evidence-based vs. popularized versions of buscom writings. This study adopts frameworks from Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis (Partington / Duguid /Taylor: 2013), and Critical Genre Analysis (Bhatia 2017) .

References

- Bhatia, V. K. (2017). *Critical Genre Analysis: Investigating Interdiscursive Performance in Professional Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Frenkel, M. (2005). Communicating management: The role of the mass media in the institutionalization of professional management and productivity discourse in Israel. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 21(2), 137–157.
- Hunston, S., & Thompson, G. (2010). *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Partington, A., Duguid, A., & Taylor, C. (2013). *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse Theory and Practice in Corpus-assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.
- Wood, T., & de Paula, A.A.P. (2008). Pop-management literature: popular business press and management culture in Brazil. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences / Revue Canadienne Des Sciences de l'Administration*, 25(3), 185–200.